May 10, 2001

Dear Interested Parties:

We are pleased to announce that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is ready to begin formal recovery planning for Pacific salmon and steelhead listed as threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in the Interior Columbia River Basin. This effort is part of a larger recovery planning effort for West Coast salmonids in general and will be integrated with other recovery initiatives underway in the Columbia Basin. At this time we are asking for your help with this ambitious effort. Specifically, we are soliciting nominations for qualified scientists to serve on a Technical Recovery Team (TRT) for the Interior Columbia Basin. The TRT will be charged with developing ESA delisting criteria for listed chinook and sockeye salmon and steelhead in the Interior Columbia Basin, as well as providing other scientific input to the recovery planning process. Below is general information on the NMFS ESA recovery planning process, as well as more detailed information on what the TRT will be asked to do, and how this work will integrate with and complement other activities in the Interior Columbia Basin.

The NMFS ESA Recovery Planning Process

The ESA and NMFS recovery planning guidance require recovery plans to contain (1) an assessment of the factors that caused the population to decline and that are impeding recovery; (2) objective, measurable criteria (delisting criteria) for determining when the species can be delisted; (3) a description of the site-specific actions needed to achieve the delisting criteria; and (4) an estimate of the cost and time required to carry out those actions. In addition, the plans should set priorities for the actions and include a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan for gauging progress toward recovery.

The first two elements above are largely a technical exercise, while the last two elements are largely a policy exercise with technical input. NMFS will address the first two elements by appointing a TRT for each recovery planning domain. For the last two elements, NMFS intends to work with state, local, regional, tribal, other federal, and private entities to craft a recovery planning process suited to each planning domain. Recovery planning domains identified by NMFS are (1) Puget Sound/Olympic Peninsula; (2) Willamette River/Lower Columbia River; (3) Interior Columbia River; (4) Oregon Coast; (5) Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast; (6) North-Central California Coast; (7) South-Central California Coast; and (8) California Central Valley.

TRTs for the Puget Sound and Willamette River/Lower Columbia domains were formed in April and May 2000, respectively. Information about these TRTs, their membership, and their activities can be found on the Internet at http://research.nwfsc.noaa.gov/cbd/trt/index.html.

The Interior Columbia Basin TRT

NMFS will be appointing a TRT to address the following seven listed Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs): Snake River fall chinook, Snake River spring/summer chinook, Snake River sockeye, and Snake River steelhead; Upper Columbia spring chinook and Upper Columbia steelhead; and Mid-Columbia steelhead. Major tasks of the TRT will be to:

* Identify delisting criteria for ESUs and viability criteria for populations within ESUs.
* Characterize habitat/fish productivity relationships.
* Identify factors for decline and factors that limit recovery.
* Identify early actions for recovery.
* Identify research, monitoring, and evaluation needs.
* Serve as science advisors for the recovery planning phaseBi.e., advise the groups charged with developing recovery measures.

For a more complete description of these tasks, please see, "Recovery Planning Guidance for Technical Recovery Teams" available on the Internet at ttp://research.nwfsc.noaa.gov/cbd/trt/guidanc9.pdf). The TRT will consist of experts in salmon biology, population dynamics, conservation biology, ecology, and other disciplines relevant to the recovery domain. We expect each team will include some members with experience working in the geographic area in question and extensive knowledge of the area and the anadromous salmonids that inhabit it. Also, each TRT member must meet the first three criteria below (numbers 1 - 3) and at least one of the remaining three criteria (numbers 4 - 6):

1. High achievement in a relevant discipline, which may include ecology, genetics, fisheries, hydrology, river geomorphology, or other appropriate disciplines.
2. High standards of scientific integrity, independence, and objectivity.
3. A demonstrated interest in, and ability to work effectively in, an interdisciplinary team setting.
4. Extensive knowledge of West Coast salmon biology, status, or habitat.
5. A record of scientific accomplishment documented by contributions to peer-reviewed literature or other evidence of success in creative scientific endeavor.
6. A demonstrated ability to forge creative solutions to complex problems.

We expect that the TRT will include at least one scientist from the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center (who must meet the same selection criteria as the other members) and ten to twelve other qualified members. These other members could come from state or other federal agencies, tribal governments, academic institutions, industry, the environmental community, or other groups. Initially, a senior policy advisor from the NMFS Northwest Regional Office in Portland will serve as liaison to the TRT to provide ESA policy guidance and ensure that the team receives the administrative support it needs.

NMFS notes that the Interior Columbia River Domain is particularly large and complex. It includes 3 sub-regions, the mid-Columbia (from above Bonneville Dam to and including the Yakima), the Snake River and the Upper Columbia (drainages above the Yakima). NMFS decided to address these sub-regions together to optimize efficiency. These domains are a logical combination for determining ESU goals and evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken under the Federal Columbia River Power System biological opinion (December 2000) and the Conservation of Columbia Fish Basinwide Recovery Strategy (All H paper) (December 2000). The TRT will need substantial technical support from the fishery agencies, tribes and academicians with expertise in the subbasins in order to successfully develop criteria that utilize all available technical information and that are integrated with subbasin planning.

We anticipate that members of the TRT will need to devote approximately 25 percent of their time to fulfill their responsibilities. However, we expect some members may need to devote 50% of their time. We expect the process of finalizing delisting criteria and related tasks for all ESUs within the domain to take up to two years. Because recovery planning is necessary to assist the FCRPS agencies in meeting the FCRPS 2000 biological opinion conditions, and because there are strict timelines for meeting the biological opinion=s requirements, the FCRPS agencies will help fund the development of TRT products.

Relationship to Other Recovery Efforts in Interior Columbia Basin

Although considerable work related to recovery of salmon and steelhead within the Interior Columbia Basin has already occurred, all such efforts are constrained by the lack of clear goals for ESA delisting and other recovery benchmarks. NMFS has not initiated formal ESA recovery planning for all listed salmon and steelhead in the basin, and draft plans for the Snake River chinook and sockeye have not been finalized. The major objective of the TRT during the initial phase of recovery planning will be to develop biologically based ESA delisting criteria for Interior Columbia Basin ESUs to provide a more specific context for the many planning efforts underway.

The work of the TRT will build on previous and existing processes and products. For example, the 1995 Proposed Recovery Plan for Snake River Salmon, the August 1997 Draft Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan, and the preliminary recovery goals identified for Upper Columbia chinook and steelhead through the Quantitative Analytical Report (QAR) process will provide a solid foundation for TRT efforts. The TRT will also be able to draw on technical analyses developed by state, tribal, and federal biologists, academic researchers, environmental consultants, and other parties. Finally, NMFS is working closely with the Northwest Power Planning Council to coordinate the Council=s subbasin planning process with data collection and analytical efforts for the TRTs and to ensure that these processes complement each other and maximize opportunities for coordination and consistency.

We appreciate your interest and assistance in this important effort. Please forward your nominations to Juliet Fabbri (Juliet.Fabbri@noaa.gov) at the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center, 2725 Montlake Boulevard East, Seattle, WA 98112 by June 22, 2001. Nominations

received by this date will be considered for the initial appointments to the TRT. In addition, NMFS will accept nominations indefinitely for inclusion in a Areserve pool@ to fill vacancies or to add members with expertise in specific areas as needed by the TRT. Nominations received at any time will be screened according to the criteria listed above.

To facilitate the evaluation process, please provide a detailed Curriculum Vitae that describes pertinent publications and experience for each nominee and a narrative explanation of how the nominee meets the selection criteria. The Curriculum Vitae and supporting documentation should provide enough information to facilitate the evaluation and selection of candidates based on the six criteria enumerated above. Based on the written materials submitted, an independent scientific panel will evaluate all nominations to ensure that they meet the above criteria. The panel will provide a list of qualified candidates to the Director of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, who will recommend selectees for approval by the Regional Administrator.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Waples at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (206) 860-3254 or Elizabeth Gaar at the Northwest Regional Office (503) 230-5434.

Sincerely,

Donna Darm
Acting Regional Administrator

Usha Varanasi, Ph.D.
Director
Northwest Fisheries Science Center